DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 547 PS 010 826

AUTHOR Miller, Samuel D.
TITLE Musical Nurture in the Early Years of Children.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aesthetic Education; *Creative Expression; Early Childhood Education; Family Environment; *Infants; *Music Appreciation; Music Education; *Preschool Children

ABSTRACT

Children are naturally musical and should be musically educated. Music provides a unique way for children to grow intellectually, emotionally and socially. Music fulfills an inner drive to express feelings and experiences in a symbolic, abstract, creative, and acceptable manner which is positive and valued. Musical nurture should begin within the home environment at birth and continue in nursery school and kindergarten. It should be centered around two basic goals: (1) to increase significantly the enjoyment and basic response to music through beautiful, appealing and imaginative experiences, and (2) to help children formulate basic concepts about the constituent patterns of the sound experienced. The first of these goals is most important. Musical nurture and learnings may be developed through enjoyable and attentive listening experiences, performance with instruments (including singing), and the creation of original compositions, effects, accompaniments, and other related activities including free interpretive dance and movement. The most significant of these activities is listening. Children from roughly 4 to 6 years of age are capable of learning a vast number of additional basic concepts about music. Learning of rhythmic, melodic, instrumentation, harmonic, dynamic and textural concepts is best facilitated through a combination of listening, performing and creating experiences. Children should be given the opportunity to grow musically in their early years, when much can be achieved easily and naturally. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Samuel D. Miller
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Samuel D. Miller
The University of Houston

EU175547
PS010826

MUSICAL NURTURE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF CHILDREN

Public esteem for the fine arts continues at an extremely high level in spite of all the newer advances in technological aspects associated with education, science, business, and industry. In educational matters, not even the latest emphasis on special and vocational education, multicultural education, the so-called return to basics, self-paced learning, competency based education, career education (just to name a few areas) have quelled or displaced the continuing public interest in and support for the fine arts.

One recent statewide survey in New York conducted by the National Research Center of Arts, a Louis Harris poll affilliate, indicates a strong thirst for various and numerous cultural activities was felt by respondents all of whom were over sixteen years of age. Results indicate further that a professional career in music ranks fourth in esteem (after science, medicine, and law), and that poetry writing and painting also rank very high. 1 Obviously there is much interest in how the arts are able to provide livelihoods for many. Perhaps even more significant, however, is the fact that ample evidence generated from the survey indicates the great majority of respondents highly value the arts as means to uplift and enrich the quality of human life.

If adult society continues to value the arts so highly, and if in this case we are particularly interested in the art of music as it relates to very young children, a key problem for parents and educators must be confronted. What, specifically, are the best ways to provide musical nurture throughout the early childhood years? In short, what are the experiences and environmental factors that will help insure or make possible musical growth?

Most parents express at one time or another the desire to have their

offsprings placed in music classes or take lessons on a given instrument. We often hear "musicality" described as if it were some special endowment, talent or faculty bestowed upon a few rather mystically gifted youngsters---almost as if through the miracle of the bestowment they are somehow able to create, consume and perform music at the start. Surprisingly, we hear little about similar specialized endowments ready for immediate implementation in other fields of human endeavors such as mathematics, science, language, or social studies. Carried to an extreme which might prove to be amusing, such a belief could suggest the existence of specialized, inborn talents for executives, secretaries, navigators, military officers, pilots, and so forth.

Seen in this light, it becomes apparent that musical ability and ensuant growth are not contingent upon specialized inborn gifts, housed somewhere in a hidden, and as yet undisclosed sector of the brain which is activated independently, but rather upon specialized musical nurture characterized by planning, the creation of enjoyable experiences, sequencing and the capture of interest through numerous positive reinforcements. In the same way these nurture characteristics are important for developing and facilitating marked achievement or success in all other areas of human learning and involvement.

One could not argue the fact that, as in numerous sports endeavors, many musical endeavors require certain natural physical (or even personality) characteristics for outstanding success. For instance, children possessing a small body-frame and hands would have difficulty excelling in playing the cello. But there is much emperical evidence to indicate the fact that musical ability is but a particular manifestation of the general mental ability or intelligence common to all human beings in various measures. 2 In the case of music, however, the data with which the brain deals is composed of tonal, rather than verbal or numerical patterns and configurations, and these exist in time, involving immediate melodic and rhythmic mental imagery, memory, and a refined

sense of anticipation. Additionally, as in any art form, but yet in its own way, music stimulates human feelings and emotions, the cultivation of that which is fitting, a sense of formal balance as it is manifested in time, and the development of accurate perceptions of grace, style and manner. These too are outcomes of careful nurture and experience rather than inborn entities.

As these requisites are experienced, developed, and learned, and as comprehension and success are achieved, aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment result. This is a predictable pattern of human behavior. Such pleasure, however, may be achieved and experienced through the shortest, simplest and most direct of musical compositions. It may even be achieved initially by unconscious, or undirected formal learning activities. For example, the tiny child bouncing in his crib, with smile on face, to a song sung rhythmically by the parent: "Robert is his first name, first name, first name," 3 is obviously responding rhythmically because he has discovered and knows something significant and predictable about the sounds around him. In short, he can cope with them in his terms.

Aesthetic pleasure is obvious, yet no formal lesson was intended. As in mother tongue development, general listening and "feeling" experiences with music are provided at the earliest possible age, and characteristic intellectual acquisition is "caught rather than taught," according to the old aphorism. At the opposite end of the growth continuum--given proper nurture--adults are able to comprehend and aesthetically and intelligently respond to and use massive musical structures and designs in personal and satisfying ways, just as they are able to respond to and use verbal, numerical, scientific, and all other manner of environmental structures and designs, some of which are necessary to the very sustenance of life itself. The process initiated at the crib wherein content becomes known through the comprehension of patterns, however, remains constant and unchanged. The goals become clarified, and the

input data more intricate, abstract, and developed. The growth process itself continues on, ceaseless, until either the potential itself is reached or the opportunity or desire for continued learning is fulfilled.

The justification of musical nurture stems from the fact that musical behavior is basic and implicit to generic human activity. It is at once symbolic of human mental and emotional concern while yet defiant of explicit or complete verbal description. Musical expression is ubiquitous in a world-wide sense and thus is exemplary of natural human outlet and enjoyment. We can safely deduce from this phenomenon that children are naturally musical and should be musically educated. Careful firsthand observation will amply affirm the musicality of children and establish the case further. They sing and hum simple songs throughout the day. They listen to music on records, television, and radio. They react rhythmically to music through simple folk dances such as "London Bridge" and "Farmer in the Dell" or through rhythmic responses to spoken chants and popular records, often those of the "top 40". They enjoy playing simple, sometimes even homemade instruments. Indeed, one needs only to examine several of the more popular and successful children's television shows to discover how well music and the world of the young go together. They are inseparable!

But beyond casual or informal experiences, music provides a unique way for children to grow--<u>intellectually</u>, because its content is impressionable, precise, and challenging; <u>emotionally</u>, because its basic communication effectively touches the heart as well as the mind; and <u>socially</u>, because musical activities involve group endeavors as well as individual endeavors. Above all, however, music fulfills some inner drive of children (and adults) to express their feelings and experiences in a symbolic, abstract, creative, and acceptable manner which is positive and valued. In this respect music, along with other great academic or artistic disciplines, places human beings at an intellectual

level far above that of the lower animals, making mankind instantly godlike and superior by comparison.

Nurture, according to definition, means to promote the development of something, whatever its essence might be, by providing nourishment, support, and encouragement. 4 This implies, for the present, guiding children from their immediate level of participation and understanding toward some goal that involves greater participation and understanding. Musical nurture should begin ideally, within the home environment at birth and continue on once nursery school or kindergarten is entered. It should be centered around two basic goals: (1) to increase significantly the enjoyment and basic response to music through beautiful, appealing and imaginative experiences, and (2) to help children formulate basic concepts about the constituent patterns of the sound experienced. The first of these goals is of preeminent or paramount importance. It should be central to every encounter with the art and should elicit sheer pleasurable and deep excitement of the emotions. The second goal, which is essentially the formulation of basic concepts regarding the manipulation of the musical elements, enhances greatly the first, simply because as human beings, children enjoy that which is understood. Thus, there exists an interdependent relationship between these two goals, making it difficult to delineate ultimately their individuality. Indeed, in the long run, they are experienced as one.

Musical nurture and learnings may be developed through three basic means--enjoyable and attentive listening experiences; performance with instruments (including singing); and creating original compositions, effects, accompaniments, and a myriad of other related things including free interpretive dance and movement. The most significant of these is listening, inasmuch as primary musical endeavors are by nature ear experiences which activate the listening sense, and all primary performance and creative accomplishments are developed out of respect and knowledge relating to how the end products should

properly sound. Moreover, musical listening at once throws open the door to a great wealth of literature of all types which otherwise could not be experienced.

Once children are born, they soon indicate awareness of music in their environment. They respond affectionately and knowingly to the sung lullaby. They indicate awareness of music played (whether or not words are sung) on a record player, radio or television. They soon begin to recognize patterns in the music heard, just as they recognize patterns in spoken language. Later, when they grow to the point where basic motor control has developed, they may move their arms and bodies rhythmically to the beat or basic flow of music.

Quite early in life, sometimes even as early as eighteen to twenty-four months of age, children will express themselves through singing. The trueness of pitch and the beauty of the tonal quality may for a brief period of time be truly exquisite and exceed that of later early childhood periods. Also at this early time, they are capable of acquiring a basic repertory of songs and echo games about subjects of appropriate and personal interest, and with encouragement and praise they are eager to perform. Such eagerness will also be noted in the carrying out of other types of expressive activities such as reciting simple nursery rhymes and "catch-phrases" from stories or performing simple, non-complex chores and assignments. Musical instruments should be introduced at this time. These should be simple enough to allow one striking motion to produce one sound, and there should be an ample number of opportunities provided for sheer "sound exploration." Indeed, this is one of the most crucial times for musical nurture, and it is best enhanced by providing opportunities for children to listen, perform, and create.

From this beginning, children are able to grow musically to a considerable degree over the next several years provided nurture is continued. Eventually, after listening to a number of short sectional compositions, they should be challenged to describe and respond to not only the basic "feeling" or mood of a

particular piece, but also to recognize its overall form or pattern. Most music, even the monumental masterwork, is structured with sections or phrases that repeat, return, or contrast. Once this basic principle of organization is understood as it pertains to even the simplest of pieces, the essential key to all further musical understanding is in hand, for it makes possible the establishment of a framework, a blueprint, so to speak, to which all else relates. In music, if a section is repeated, it follows itself immediately with no interjection. Thus, if we have a short, simple piece with four sections or phrases and the first, second, and fourth are alike, or nearly alike, and the third is different, we have the simple pattern A-A-B-A (to use a designation applied by musicians), a most common musical design. The pattern contains one repeat, one contrast, and one return: other basic common patterns might be A-A-B-B, A-B-A-B, A-A-B, A-B-A-C, etc. From this meager beginning, children begin to cross the bridge which leads ultimately to the comprehension of all types of music, including the great masterworks of the cherished cultural heritage.

How do small children indicate their understanding of musical designs? They indicate it through an infinite number of creative and pleasurable ways. They might move rhythmically in some manner for one section of music, perhaps using a directional walk or run and use contrasting movements to indicate another section, perhaps standing in place and using flowing arm motions or crouching on the floor like a little ball and growing into something big as the music swells. These activities provide the basis for understanding dance as well as musical structure.

Children like to play contrasting instruments to accompany contrasting sections of music. They may use colored crayons, chalk, or crepe paper streamers to indicate musical changes. Simple graphs, designs, or pictures may be effective. Frequently, simple but imaginative dramatizations may also be used

to good advantage. No matter what stimulant is utilized, the important thing is that it proves effective for accurately assessing whether or not the responses are indicative of musical understanding and intellectual growth.

Over and through the phrase and sectional designs of beautiful music are various tension and release patterns which cause human emotions and feelings to become aroused. These patterns constitute the aesthetic component. They are the tonal embodiments and symbols of life essence itself. Children instinctively and accurately respond to them. They can describe where the music grows to a point of arrival, where it comes to rest, where it becomes exciting because there is agitation in the musical texture, where it is stagnant and ominous, where it climbs to the top--or descends to nothingness. But children describe and respond to these effects, as best they can, in <u>their</u> terms after careful listening. Again, however, more should be expected in a planned nurture program. Children should be encouraged to create, play and sing similar effects and to improvise or plan original "compositions." Often these compositions are truly fascinating and worthy of preserving via tape recording, for they set children free to express themselves, to loose themselves, so to speak, in a vast accessible world of sound that goes far beyond what they can technically, explicitly, and intellectually control or describe. These original works may take children into the heart of musical expressions and dimensions immediately, rather than postpone this valuable journey until such time as maturity is fully developed through slow, laborious processes.

Along with the major goal of enjoyment and the associated concepts thus far described, children from roughly four to six years of age are capable of learning a vast number of additional basic concepts about music. While the number suggested seems extensive, the choice of those actually explored is an individual matter, depending upon the adults involved in the nurture program, the children themselves, the available teaching equipment, and the quality of

the learning environment. Again, such learnings are best facilitated through a combination of listening, performing, and creating experiences, all of which are aimed at reinforcing the acquisition of the concepts.

Rhythmic Concepts

1. Steady beat. Usually this will be a "walking" or "running" beat in the music. Parents and teachers are cautioned to remember that a "walking" beat for small children is both physically and mentally faster than that of an adult or older child.
2. Accented and unaccented beats.
3. Even rhythm (wherein notes are evenly spaced in time) and uneven rhythm (wherein notes are spaced in "long-short" patterns).
4. Meters moving in two's or three's (1-2, 1-2, or 1-2-3).
5. Tempos (fast and slow, becoming faster or slower).
6. Melody rhythms.

Melodic Concepts

1. Up and down (high and low). These space referent terms are used in a unique manner in music since tones are placed in time rather than space. As a result, there exist no visual up or down positions. Confusing to some children is the fact that these terms are often related to loud and soft in other contexts. For example, we turn the television up or down.
2. Skipping up and down, stepping up and down, and repeating tones in the melody.
3. Moving up or down by an extended number of steps or skips in the melody.
4. Moving by combinations of skips, steps, and repeated tones in the melody.
5. Detached and smoothly connected melody tones.

Instrumentation Concepts

1. Sight and sound recognition of several of the important solo instruments.
2. Sight and sound recognition of certain combinations or families of musical instruments.
3. Rudimentary physical characteristics of selected instruments.
4. Rudimentary playing operations involved with selected instruments.

Harmonic Concepts

1. Consonant and dissonant harmonies by ear and performance.
2. Major and minor sounding melodies and harmonies by ear.
3. A feeling for and recognition of the "home" or "I" chord by ear.
4. A feeling for and recognition by ear of the proper accompaniment chords (I and V^7) for a simple melody when played on an autoharp or piano by parents or teachers.

Dynamics and Texture Concepts

1. Loud and soft. Becoming louder or softer.
2. Melody as distinguished from accompaniment.
3. Chordal accompaniments and melodies played together making harmony for each other.

All children possess potentials for musical development. Whether or not these potentials are reached will be determined to a large extent on basic beliefs or philosophies held. It is possible that many adults are unaware of the tremendous and exciting possibilities for children to participate in and understand much about theworld of music long before first grade is entered. Gradually, however, there seems to be a progressive awakening and realization of these possibilities as more parents are actively seeking out musical exposures for their children and as nursery schools and kindergartens are beginning to introduce music within the total program.

Music can provide one of the easiest, most accessible, and pleasurable avenues to the entire realm of human learning. It unifies, individualizes, stimulates, touches profoundly and teaches from a purely automous state. It can be a subject unto itself. Contrariwise, music enriches, relates to other areas, broadens perceptions, and provides a refreshing change of pace within the total daily life of young children. Music can be a fascinating service vehicle for learning much about other things. The most important consideration is, however, that children be afforded the opportunity to grow musically throughout a period of their young lives when much can be achieved so easily and naturally. There must not be musical stagnation and waste, for this surely represents intellectual, emotional, social and physical stagnation and waste of a particular and valuable type.

Footnotes

[1]National Research Center of the Arts, Survey of Statewide Cultural Attitudes, reported in The Houston Post (Houston, Texas), June 14, 1973.

[2]See the writer's article entitled "A Theory of Musicality as It Relates to General Intelligence," College Music Symposium, College Music Society, XVII, No. 2 (Fall, 1977), p.

[3]"Inside Our Circle," Growing with Music, Book I, H. Wilson et al., editors (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966) p.41.

[4]See The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, unabridged edition, Jess Stein, editorial director (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 990.